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ABSTRACT

This profile in outline form of the English language teaching situation in the Gambia discusses the role of English in the community and within the educational system. The number of hours allocated weekly to the teaching of English in the primary school, junior secondary and senior secondary schools and teacher's training college are discussed, as well as the choices of teaching materials and syllabi at these levels, and the methods of assessing English proficiency. The make-up of the teaching cadre is outlined, along with British and American support for the teaching of English. A general statement concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the English language teaching situation concludes the profile, including recommendations for English instruction at the Training College, course materials in the primary schools, and communication between individuals involved with English language teaching in the Gambia. Brief mention is made of current research. (CLK)

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ENGLISH-TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

COUNTRY: The Gambia June 1975

1. The Role of English

1.1 English is used as the medium of instruction from the beginning of the first year in the primary school.

1.2 English is used as a medium of communication throughout all official sections of the Community. In practice, of course, vernacular languages are used but they do not necessarily form a lingua franca. The only common official language is English and it is often the only practical means of communication between the natives of The Gambia.

2. English within the Educational System

2.1 The number of hours per week allocated to the teaching of English in the:-

2.1.1 Primary School - Two short periods of about 20 minutes a day in form 1 increasing to a full eight hours in primary VI.

2.1.2 Junior Secondary Schools - between six and nine hours a week.

2.1.3 Senior Secondary Schools - eight hours a week in the earlier forms down to about five or six in the higher forms.

2.1.4 The Teachers' Training College - This varies but it is never more than the same proportion of time given to other subjects. There are a host of other subjects and therefore the percentage of time given to English is always very low. There are, however, to be changes giving greater emphasis on English at the new college in 1975/1976.

2.2 No formal distinction is made between English Language and English Literature at Primary Level and very little enters in at the Junior Secondary School level. There is, however, a definite distinction made as regards teaching and examination at all higher levels, because of examination requirements.

2.3 English is examined by:-

2.3.1 The Common Entrance Examination for Secondary Schools (West African Examinations Council) held annually at the end of the Primary School ie at the end of the Primary Schools' Sixth year. This is highly competitive and selection is made at this stage for all secondary school places. The best placed children being offered places at the Senior Secondary Schools if they can afford this. Success at this exam depends entirely on written work. (In 1974 there were 4373 Candidates of which 1501 obtained places in Secondary schools; of these places only 350 were in senior secondary schools ie with the opportunity of continuing schooling beyond form IV. Copies of the English papers for 1974 are located in ETIC Archives).

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2.3.2 The Junior Secondary Schools' leaving examination which is taken at the end of the fourth year. Copies of the syllabus and the latest examination paper are in ETIC Archives. This is, of course, a local examination and small committees are set up to consider the revision of the syllabuses from time to time. The ACE is Consultant to the English Committee.

2.3.3 In the Senior Secondary schools the sole purpose as far as English is concerned is virtually to obtain success in the West African Examinations Council GCE. There are a few candidates for London GCE. The Gambia High School is the only school in the country with a Sixth form where English is examined by the WAEC or London GCE at 'A' level.

2.3.4 English is examined along with all other subjects at the end of the three year course at the one training College in the Gambia. This is a written examination and virtually a formality. Many candidates pass who cannot handle the oral English standard required in the primary school. However changes are imminent following the appointment of a new Principal (British) and the building of a new College now to be known as the Gambia College of Further Education, Brikama.

2.4 Section 2.3 above really indicates the requirement factor that success in English plays in advancement within the educational system. Note that any Gambian wanting to enter a University would have to go abroad and of course English would be an entry requirement. For entry to the training college, however, good English at Secondary School form IV level would be a help but many entrants get by with a much lower standard.

2.5 The responsibility for syllabuses and choice of textbooks is centrally controlled for the Primary and Junior Secondary School in so far as there are Government schools ie figures for Primary Schools are:-

Government - 70 schools - 15,860 pupils

but not necessarily for the local agreement and mission schools ie

Local Agreement - 7 schools - 3,093 pupils
Mission - 17 schools - 3,676 pupils

though many of the latter primary schools follow the recommendations of the central authority.

Figures for the Junior Secondary Schools are:-

Government - 11 schools - 2,920 pupils
Local Agreement - 2 schools - 277 pupils
Mission - 4 schools - 1,003 pupils.

There is no control of syllabus or choice of textbook in the Senior Secondary Schools, the majority of which are Mission Schools. Numbers as follows:

Mission - 3 schools - 760 pupils
Government - 1 school - 367 pupils
Independent - 1 school - 464 pupils

2.6 The inspecting of the Schools is carried out by Education Officers plus their assistant supervising teachers. These have hitherto been stationed at Education Head quarters in Banjul. A current plan for regionalisation will station these Officers in the Divisions which are their special responsibility. This should result in more regular attention given to the upcountry divisions. In this organisation however there is no specialist responsibility for English. This has only come about in an advisory capacity with the arrival of the ACE in October 1971.

2.7 The only emphasis on the teaching of English for special purposes has come with the arrival of the ACE. The following courses have been tried out at the English Language Centre set up by the ACE in a small annex to the National Library:-

Undergraduate Nurses - Medical English
Radio Gambia Production teams - Mostly advanced stress, intonation and journalistic English.

The classes for the nurses have now been taken over by a Gambian understudy.

There is no guarantee yet that this type of activity will remain a permanent feature. A decision has yet to be made on the Government's permanent investment in an ELTI. This is most likely to come about through the integration of the English Language Centre in the Curriculum Development Centre in mind for the new College at Brikama (1976).

2.8 There is no provision for the teaching of English to adults other than those courses mentioned in 2.7 above, plus the potential a decision on permanently investing in the ELTI would provide.

3. Teaching Cadre

3.1 Primary - 100% local

Junior Secondary - by far the major proportion are local staff but augmented with Peace Corps and volunteers - more especially the former. The numbers of the latter two groups vary from year to year.

Senior Secondary - A majority of expatriate Irish fathers, brothers and sisters in the three Mission Schools. A majority of local staff but augmented with Peace Corps in the one Government and one Independent Senior School, apart from a very few volunteers the only British expatriates in the Senior Secondary Schools is the teacher i/c the English Department at the Gambia High School, plus one assistant teacher. This is one of the Mission schools, the only one with a 6th form,

There are two members of the English Department at the Training College - one Gambian and one a British expatriate lady. The latter is leaving (July 1975) and another British Lecturer plus the part time lecturing services of the Advisory ACE have been requested. No final decision on firm terms of reference have yet been made.

3.2	Number of Qualified Staff	Qualification carrying full professional status
Primary	55% to 60%	Local Teacher Training pass
Junior Secondary	80%	Local Teacher Training pass
Senior Secondary	100%	Degree
Training College	100%	Degree or Teacher Training Overseas

Note: For senior posts in the larger Junior Secondary Schools a degree would be necessary.

3.3 Training of local teachers of English must initially be through the education levels already detailed. Further training in the Gambia is limited to rather short in-service training courses during the long hot summer vacation.

ACE has occasionally held Saturday training courses - usually the same group of teachers on four non-consecutive Saturdays. There has been one very successful course for all Junior Secondary teachers of English. However the training programme generally lacks long term planning.

It has not been possible to persuade the department to release a group of teachers for a much more valuable period during the climatically suitable time of the year.

Any advanced training carrying a special qualification would have to be abroad.

3.4 The Gambian Association of Teachers of English is the only one. The backbone of this are the Mission teachers but the Association needs a more clearly defined purpose and better direction which we are hoping to achieve bit by bit. We now have Gambians in two of the three most important Committee posts.

4. Teaching Materials

4.1 A survey in 1971 by way of questionnaires revealed that most primary schools suffered very badly indeed from a shortage of the prescribed text book and even more from a lack of graded supplementary readers. The only classes that appeared to be reasonably well equipped were those using the ita medium. Here the equipment had been provided free by the ita foundation.

Following recommendations made by a special investigating Committee with the ACE as chairman the ita experiment has been discontinued. However the ACE, through the British Council, has been personally conducting the distribution of sets of graded OCEAN READERS donated by the Jersey Overseas Aid Committee. These readers are particularly suitable to an African Country with a sea-bord and have been very successful indeed in the Gambian Schools. The full programme of distribution and associated teacher training should be completed by the end of 1975. It remains to be seen whether the success of such readers will move the Gambian Government to make future investment themselves.

The shortage in Junior Secondary Schools is not so acute but it exists especially with regard to readers and other library books. The supply in Senior Secondary Schools is good from all aspects and most have their own school libraries.

NOTE: The ODM's Library Adviser's plans have been accepted by both British and Gambian Governments. This includes the provision of capital resources in the region of £60,000 for the renovation, revitalizing and expansion of library services. This is currently underway and includes an Education Library Service to primary and junior secondary schools. Development is a slow and painful process due to lack of training in administration and formidable transport difficulties. However most Junior Secondary Schools and a very small selection of primary schools are taking part in a library loan scheme of extremely relevant well chosen books.

4.2 The general pattern is one of uniformity in textbooks.

4.3 4.3.1 Straight for English in all Government primary schools and most others.

4.3.2 Junior Secondary Schools:-

Following a special course for all Junior Secondary teachers of English in 1974 the following course books were earmarked for adoption in due course.

Moody's Organised English
Montgomery's Effective English

Following course recommendations the ACE is currently producing a new proposed JSS English Syllabus (now almost complete) which it is hoped will be considered by the appropriate committee in the autumn of this year (1975).

In the meantime recommended teaching materials remain as follows:-

Text Books) All forms)	Evans Secondary English Course for Africa English One, Two, Three etc by Raymond O'Malley	
Reading List Form I	Children of the New Forest	- Marryat
	Collected Stories for Children	- de la Mare
	The Merchant of Venice	- Shakespeare
	David Copperfield	- Charles Dickens
	Little Women	- Alcott
	The Story of a School	- Stone
	Short Stories	- Powys
	Tom Brown's School Days	- Hughes
	The Voyage to Lilliput	- Swift
	The Jungle Book	- Kipling
For the Teacher		
Form I	The English Language. A short History for African Schools	- Stitt
	Living English Structure	- W S Allen
	The Teaching of English	- Quirk & Smith

Reading List

Form 2	Oliver Twist	- Dickens
	Robinson Crusoe	- Defoe
	Jo's Boys	- Alcott
	Othello	- Shakespeare
	Black Beauty	- Anna Sewell
	Told Again	- de la Mare
	The Mason Wasps	- Fabre
	Don Quixote	- Cervantes
	The Jungle Book	- Kipling

Further Teaching

Form 2	Teaching English as a Foreign Language	- Gauntlett
	The Techniques of Language Teaching	- Billows
	Dramatic Work with Children	- Langdon

Reading List

Form 3	Rhyme and Reason, an anthology	- O'Malley
	Wuthering Heights	- Bronte
	Life on the Mississippi	- Twain
	Great Expectations	- Dickens
	The Thirty-Nine Steps	- Buchan
	Kossoh Tonn Boy	- Cole
	The Machine Steps	- E M Forster
	Many Inventions	- Kipling
	Pilgrims Progress	- Bunyan

For the Teacher

Form 3	A Grammar of Modern English	- Mittens
	Our Language	- Simeon Potter
	An Anthology of Poems from West Africa	
	The Teaching of Poetry	- Reeves

Reading List

Form 4	A Pattern of Islands	- Grimble
	Tom Sawyer	- Twain
	The Dark Child	- Camara Laye
	The Prince and the Pauper	- Twain
	The First Man in the Moon	- Wells

For the Teacher

Form 4	The Teaching of English Grammar	- Gurney
	Good speaking	- Henderson
	Play productions	- J Allen

4.4 The Senior Secondary Schools and more particularly the Training College have been introduced to the idea of using the tape-recorder as a classroom aid. Available on loan to them now are:-

The English Language Units
Success with English
A Modern Course in Business English
Mackins Course of Spoken English
The English we use
Drills and Tests in English Sounds
Living English Speech
Talk English
A Higher Course in English Study

Listen and Teach recordings (21 titles)
Mackin's Higher Course of English Study
Varieties of English

These are not yet by any means widely used but one or two enthusiasts are exploiting them very well under guidance.

4.5 Primary Teachers' Workshops have been usefully directed towards the production of teaching aids made of materials easily available locally.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

6.1 6.1.1 ACE seconded to the Education Department as English Language Adviser. Local Salary contribution is paid by the Gambian Government. Towards the end of 1975 the ACE is likely to be more closely concerned with the new college - both in its Curriculum development centre and as lecturer.

6.1.2 Nil

6.1.3 There are only two VSOs teaching English at the moment. Numbers do vary but are never very high. VSOs are relatively expensive ie about £750 per annum for the Gambian Government as opposed to Peace Corps members who cost very little indeed.

6.1.4 Teacher in charge of the English Department of the Gambia High School (6th form level) - recruited by the Methodist Mission. Assistant teacher of English at the Gambia High School recruited by the same agency. This latter appointment varies with the availability of suitably qualified and experienced Gambian Teachers of English.

6.2 See 6.1.4 above.

6.3 The main activities of the ACE are:-

6.3.1 advisory

6.3.2 teacher training courses

6.3.3 some materials production for the primary school which involves follow up and inspection.

6.3.4 some direct teaching at the English Language Centre. This is experimental and is being carried out to identify the needs, especially for Special English Courses. The Gambians are to decide in the long run whether they wish to invest with trained Gambians in these small but important ELTI activities.

NOTE: English by Radio is not possible because the Gambians do not own their own transmitter. Facilities are hired from cable and wireless.

6.4 An exhibition is expected later this year (1975).

6.5 As indicated elsewhere the majority of textbooks and tapes used are British. In addition a number of British educational and documentary films are shown.

6.6 There is no Council Centre. The English Language Centre is at the moment a temporary innovation which is part of the Education Department but is largely supported by Council soft and hardware. The direct teaching (all Special English Courses) by the ACE or his understudy has been in the region of ten to twelve hours a week.

7. American Support for the Teaching of English

7.1 Although there is only one Peace Corps member engaged directly in the teaching of English at least 17 members engaged in teaching other subjects are indirectly concerned with improving standards of English. However during the next academic year (1975/76) there will be no Peace Corps teachers in any of the Junior Secondary Schools - only in Senior Secondary Schools. This will mean an even bigger over-all reduction in numbers.

7.2 Anglo-American Co-operation exists in all education spheres especially in that of curriculum development. A Peace Corps team of six primary specialists will be devising a new integrated primary syllabus beginning in July 1975 for the whole of Gambia.

8. General Statement

The main strength of the ELT situation lies in the relatively widespread use of English as a medium of communication in all important spheres of influence throughout the country. This factor, by the irony of circumstances, is probably also much responsible for a 'laissez-faire' policy in the field of ELT. It is as though, having introduced the medium so early in school, the Gambians feel there is nothing left to learn later on. This is a pity because proportions are so manageable here (a population of less than half a million). The following specific weaknesses could be remedied if policy and determination at the top could be modified.

8.1 The teaching of English at the Training College. This is still archaic and the department under-staffed. The organisation of the whole curriculum (ie involving the timetable of other subjects) could be modified to the benefit of all subjects apart from the medium, English. Much too large a proportion of students finish their training not being able to cope with the English needed in the primary school. More exposure to English through the breakdown of student groups plus the use of intensive methods could easily be implemented. Unfortunately it is still hard to get away from the idea that the remedy lies in a highly qualified English honours graduate lecturing to groups of sixty or more students on Shakespeare and the like. The ACE has now provided a new syllabus. Little action has yet been taken. However the efforts of the new British Principal with the possible closer association of the ACE himself - the new College of further education in the Gambia should improve matters.

8.2 The primary schools need more help with Course materials. Something that is easier to interpret correctly and therefore use in meaningful active situations.

8.3 Lack of contact between all those concerned with ELT in the Gambia.

9. Current Research and Bibliography

9.1 An oral English lessons project initiated by the ACE - details have been sent to the Chief Inspector.

9.2 Hopes in the future from the Curriculum Development Centre and Resources Centre at the New College.